

# The Selfishness of Amelia Lamkin

BY MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

IT was a morning in late February. The day before, there had been a storm of unusually damp, clogging snow, which had lodged upon everything in strange, shapeless masses. The trees bore big blobs of snow, caught here and there in forks or upon extremities. They looked as if the northeaster had pelted them with snowballs. Below the rise of ground on which the Lamkin house stood there was a low growth of trees, and they resembled snowball bushes in full bloom. Amelia Lamkin at her breakfast table could see them. There were seven persons at the breakfast table: Josiah Lamkin and his wife Amelia; Annie Sears, the eldest daughter, who was married and lived at home; Addie Lamkin, the second daughter, a pretty girl of eighteen; Tommy Lamkin, aged thirteen; little Johnny Field, a child of four, an orphan grandchild of Amelia's; and Jane Strong, Amelia's unmarried sister, who was visiting her. Annie Sears was eating toast and eggs prepared in a particular way. She was delicate and careful about her diet. The one maid in the household was not trusted to prepare Annie's eggs. Amelia did that. Addie loathed eggs in any form except an omelet, and Hannah, the maid, could not achieve one. Therefore Amelia cooked Addie's nice, puffy omelet. Johnny's rice was cooked in a special way which Hannah had not mastered, and Amelia prepared that. Josiah liked porterhouse beefsteak broiled to an exact degree of rareness, and Hannah could not be trusted with that. Hannah's coffee was always muddy, and the Lamkins detested muddy coffee; therefore Amelia made the coffee.

Hannah's morning duties resolved themselves into standing heavily about, resting her weight first upon one large flat foot, then upon the other, while her mistress prepared breakfast. There was a theory in the Lamkin household that

poor Hannah worked very hard, since she was the only maid in a family of seven; and Hannah herself felt pleasantly and comfortably injured. Nobody pitied Amelia Lamkin. She had always obliterated herself to that extent that she seemed scarcely to have a foothold upon the earth, but to balance timidly upon the extreme edge of existence. Amelia's unmarried sister, Jane Strong, always expressed her unsolicited opinion. The Lamkins were justly incensed, and even Amelia herself bristled her soft plumage of indignation.

Jane was much handsomer than Amelia, although she was ten years older. Amelia was faded almost out as to color, and intense solicitude for others and perfect meekness had crossed her little face with deep lines, and bowed her slender figure like that of a patient old horse accustomed to having his lameness ignored, and standing before doors in harness through all kinds of weather. Amelia's neck, which was long and slender, had the same curve of utter submission which one sees in the neck of a weary old beast of burden. She would slightly raise that drooping neck to expostulate with Jane. There would be a faint suggestion of ancient spirit; then it would disappear. Jane, her own chin raised splendidly, eyed her sister with a sort of tender resentment and contempt.

"Of course you know," said Jane, "that I'm enough sight better off the way I am. I'm freer than any married woman in the world. Then I've kept my looks. My figure is just as good as it ever was. I haven't got to lopping over my corsets and belts, or shrinking down to next to nothing. My color is as good as it ever was, and my hair's just as thick and not a thread of gray. I suppose the time's got to come, if I live long enough, that I shall look in my glass and see my skin yellow and flabby; but now the only change is that I'm settled *past*

change. I know that means I'm not young, and some may think not as good-looking, but I *am*." Jane regarded her sister with a sort of defiance. What she said was true. Her face was quite as handsome as in her youth; all the change lay in the fact of its impregnability to the shift and play of emotions. A laugh no longer transformed her features. These reigned triumphant over mirth and joy, even grief. She was handsome, but she was not young. She was immovably Jane Strong.

"I think you are just as good-looking as you ever were," replied Amelia. As she spoke she gave a gentle sigh. Amelia, after all, was human. As a girl she had loved the soft, sweet face, suffused with bloom like an apple blossom, which she had seen in her looking-glass. She had enjoyed arranging the pretty, fair hair around it. Now that enjoyment was quite gone out of her life. The other face had been so dear and pleasant to see. She could not feel the same toward this little, seamed countenance, with its shade of grayish hair over the lined temples, and its meek downward arc of thin lips.

When Amelia sighed, Jane looked at her with a sort of angry pity. "You might be just as good-looking as you ever were yourself if you had taken decent care of yourself and not worn yourself out for other folks," said she. "There was no more need of your getting all bent over, nor older than you were, and no need of your hair getting so thin and gray. You ought to have taken the time to put a tonic on it, and you ought to stretched yourself out on the bed a good hour every afternoon, and remembered to hold your shoulders back."

"I haven't had much time to lie down every afternoon."

"You might have had if you had set others to doing what they ought, instead of doing it yourself."

Amelia bristled again, this time with more vigor. "You know," said she, "that Hannah can't cook. It isn't in her."

"I'd get a girl who could cook."

"I can't discharge Hannah after all the years she has been with me. She is cranky, too, and I doubt if she could stay long with anybody except me. I know just how to manage her."

"She knows just how to manage you. They all do."

"Jane Strong, I won't hear you talk so about my family and poor Hannah."

"I should think it was poor Amelia."

"I have everything to be thankful for," said Amelia. "And as for cooking, you know I always liked to do it, Jane."

"Yes, you always liked to do everything that everybody else didn't. No doubt about that; and you always pretended you liked to eat everything that everybody else didn't."

"I have everything I want to eat."

"What did you make your breakfast of this morning?" demanded Jane.

Amelia reflected. She colored a little, then she looked defiantly at her sister. "Beefsteak, and omelet, and biscuit, and coffee," said she.

Jane sniffed. "Yes, a little scraggly bit of steak that Josiah didn't want, and that little burnt corner of Addie's omelet, and the under crust of Tommy's biscuit, and a muddy cup of watered coffee, after all the others had had two cups apiece. You needn't think I didn't see. Amelia Lamkin! You are a fool! You are killing yourself, and you are hurting your whole family, and that good-for-nothing Hannah thrown in."

Then Amelia looked at Jane with sudden distress. "What do you mean?" she quavered.

"Just what I say. You are simply making your whole family a set of pigs, and Hannah too, and you know you have an awful responsibility toward an ignorant person like that, and you are ruining your own health."

"I am very well indeed, Jane," said Amelia, but she spoke with a slight hesitation.

"You are not well. No mortal woman who has ever lived her whole life on the fag-ends of food, and rest and happiness that nobody else had any use for, can be well. You've been doing your duty all your life so hard that you haven't given other people a chance to do theirs. You've been a very selfish woman as far as duty is concerned, Amelia Lamkin, and you have made other people selfish. If Addie marries Arthur Henderson, what kind of a wife will she make after the way you have brought her up? Addie has no more idea of waiting on

herself than if she were a millionairess, and he's a poor man."

"Money isn't everything."

"It is a good deal," responded Jane, sententiously, "and I guess Addie Lamkin will find it is if she marries Arthur Henderson and has to live on next to nothing a year, with everything going up the way it is now, when you have to stretch on your tiptoes and reach your arms up as if you were hanging for dear life to a strap on a universe trolley-car, to keep going at all. But I don't care about them. You *are* miserable. You can't hide it from me. You have lost flesh."

"I haven't been weighed lately."

"You don't need to get weighed. You can tell by your clothes. That gray silk dress you wore last night fairly hung on you."

"I always went up and down in my weight; you know I did, Jane."

"One of these days you will go down and never come up," retorted Jane, with grim assurance. Then Addie Lamkin, young and vigorous and instinct with beauty and health, marched into the room, and in her wake trailed Annie, sweet and dainty in a pale blue cashmere wrapper.

Addie, with her young cheeks full of roses, with her young yellow hair standing up crisply above her full temples, with her blue eyes blazing, with her red mouth pouting, opened fire. "Now, Aunt Jane," said Addie, "Annie and I couldn't help overhearing—the door has been open all the time,—and we have made up our minds to speak right out and tell you what we think. We love to have you here,—don't we, Annie?"

"Yes, indeed, we love to have you, Aunt Jane," assented Annie, in her soft voice, which was very like her mother's.

Amelia made a little distressed noise.

"Don't you say a word, mother," said Addie. Addie's face had the expression of one who dives. "We simply can't have you making mother miserable, Aunt Jane," said she, "and you might just as well understand. Don't you agree with me, Annie?"

"Yes," said Annie.

"Don't, dear," said Amelia.

"I must," Addie replied, firmly. "We both love Aunt Jane, and we are not

lacking in respect to her, as to an older woman, but we must do our duty. Aunt Jane, you simply must not interfere with mother."

Jane's face wore a curious expression. "How do I interfere?" asked she.

"You interfere with mother's having her own way and doing exactly what she likes," said Addie.

"And you never do?"

"No," replied Addie, "we never do. None of us do."

"No, we really don't," said Annie. She spoke apologetically. She was not as direct as Addie.

"You are quite right," said Jane Strong. "I don't think any of you ever do interfere with your mother. You let her have her own way about slaving for you and waiting upon you. Not the slightest doubt of it."

Addie looked fairly afire with righteous wrath. "Really, Aunt Jane," said she, "I don't feel that, as long as it makes mother's whole happiness to live as she does, you are called upon to hinder her."

Amelia in her turn was full of wrath. "I am sure I don't want to be hindered," said she.

"We know you don't, mother dear," said Addie, "and you shall not be."

"You need not worry," said Jane, slowly. "I shall not hinder your mother, but I miss my guess if she isn't hindered." Then she went out of the room, her head up, her carriage as majestic as that of a queen.

"Aunt Jane is hopping," said Addie, "but as for having poor mother teased and made miserable, I won't, for one!"

"Your aunt has never had a family and she doesn't understand, dear," said Amelia. She was a trifle bewildered by her daughter's partisanship. She was not well, and had had visions of Addie's offering to assist about luncheon. Now she realized that Addie would consider that such an offer would make her unhappy.

"No, mother dear, you shall have your own way," Annie said, caressingly. "Your own family knows what makes you happy, and you shall do just what you like." Annie put her arm around her mother's poor little waist and kissed her softly. "I am feeling wretchedly this morning," said Annie. "I think I

will follow Dr. Emerson's advice to wrap myself up and sit out on the piazza an hour. I can finish that new book."

"Mind you wrap up well," Amelia said, anxiously.

"I think I will finish embroidering my silk waist," said Addie. "I want to wear it to the Simpsons' party Saturday night."

Then the daughters went away, and Amelia Lamkin went into the kitchen and prepared luncheon.

She worked all the morning. She did not sit down for a moment until lunch-time. Then suddenly the hindrance which Jane Strong had foretold that morning came without a moment's warning. There had not been enough fish left from the dinner of the day before to prepare the ramekins for the family and allow Tommy two, unless Amelia went without. She was patiently eating a slice of bread and butter and drinking tea when she fell over in a faint. The little, thin creature slid gently into her swoon, not even upsetting her teacup. She fainted considerably, as she had always done everything else. Jane, who sat next her sister, caught her before she had fallen from her chair. Josiah sprang up, and stood looking intensely shocked and perfectly helpless. Addie ran for a smelling-bottle, and Annie leaned back and gasped, as if she were about to faint herself. Tommy stared, with a spoon half way to his mouth. Then he swallowed the contents of the spoon from force of habit. Then he stared again, and turned pale under his freckles. The baby cried and pounded the table with his fists.

Amelia's face under its thin film of gray hair was very ghastly. Jane, supporting that poor head, looked impatiently at Josiah standing inert, with his fresh countenance fixed in that stare of helpless, almost angry, astonishment. "For goodness' sake, Josiah Lamkin," said his sister-in-law, "don't stand there gawping like a nincompoop, but go for Dr. Emerson, if you've got sense enough!" Jane came from New England, and in moments of excitement she showed plainly the influence of the land of her birth. She spoke with forcible, almost vulgar inelegance, but she spoke with the effect of an Ethan Allen or a Stark.

Josiah moved. He made one stride to the door.

"Stop fainting away, Annie Sears," said Jane, "and hand me that glass of water for your mother, then spank that bawling young one. Tommy, tell Hannah to march up-stairs lively and get your mother's bed ready." Hannah at that moment appeared in the doorway, and she promptly dropped a cup of coffee, which crashed and broke into fragments with a gush of brown liquid. At the sound of that crash there was a slight flicker of poor Amelia Lamkin's weary eyelids, but they immediately closed. "Let that coffee and that cup be, now you have smashed it," said Jane Strong to Hannah, "and for goodness' sake stop staring and get up-stairs lively and get Mrs. Lamkin's bed ready. Why don't you move?"

Hannah moved. Annie came falteringly around with a glass of water. Tommy caught up the morning paper and fanned his mother, while the tears rolled over his hard, boyish cheeks, and he gulped convulsively.

"Oh, what ails her?" gasped Annie, holding the glass of water to her mother's white lips.

Jane was pitiless. "She's dead, for all I know," said she. "She's an awful time coming to. For the land's sake don't spill that water all over her! Dip your fingers in and sprinkle some on her forehead. Haven't you got any sense at all?"

Annie sprinkled her mother's forehead as if she were baptizing her. "Oh, what is it?" she moaned again.

"She's dead if she ain't fainted away," said Jane. "How do I know? But I can tell you what the matter is, Annie Sears, and you, too, Addie Lamkin" (for Addie was just returning with the little green smelling-bottle). "Your mother is worn out with hard work because you've all been so afraid to cross her in slaving for everybody else and having nothing for herself. She's worked out and starved out. Here, for goodness' sake, set down that old smelling-bottle, and, Tommy, you come here and help hold her head; and, Annie, you stop sniffing and shaking and help Addie, and we'll lay her down on the floor. She'll never come to, sitting up."

"I knew that all the time," volunteered Tommy, in a shaking voice. "Teacher said to lay Jim Addison down that time when he bumped his nose against his desk reaching down for a marble he dropped."

Between them they lowered the little inanimate form to the floor, and Tommy got a sofa cushion from the sitting-room and put it under his mother's head. Then Jane broke down completely. She became hysterical.

"Oh, Amelia, Amelia," she wailed, in a dreadful voice of ascending notes, "my sister, the only sister I've got! Amelia, speak to me! Amelia, can't you hear? Speak to me!"

Annie sank down on the floor beside her unconscious mother and wept weakly. Addie, with her lips firmly set, rubbed her mother's hands. Tommy fanned with all his might! The morning paper made a steady breeze above the still, white face. The baby had succeeded in reaching the sugar-bowl and had stopped crying.

Amelia did not revive. Hannah stood in the door. She stammered out that the bed was ready; then she, too, wailed the wail of her sort, lifting high a voice of uncouth animal woe.

"She's dead, she's dead!" at last sobbed Jane. "She'll never speak to any of us again. Oh, Amelia, Amelia, to think it should come to this!"

Addie, with one furious glance at her aunt, stopped rubbing her mother's hands. She stood back. She looked very stiff and straight. Her face was still, but tears rolled over her cheeks as if they were marble. Annie wept with gentle grief. Jane continued to lament, as did Hannah. The baby steadily ate sugar. Only Tommy held steadfast. He never whimpered, and he fanned as if life depended upon the newspaper gale.

Then there was a quick rattle of wheels, and Jane rushed to the door and shrieked out: "You're too late, doctor; you're too late!"

Poor Josiah, who had driven back with the doctor and was already out of the buggy, turned ghastly white.

"Oh, my God, she's gone!" he gasped.

The doctor, who was young and optimistic, clapped him on the shoulder. "Brace up, man!" he said, in a loud voice. Then he pushed rather rudely past Jane and Hannah and Addie and Annie. He knelt down beside the prostrate woman, looked at her keenly, felt her wrist, and held his head to her breast. Then he addressed Tommy. "How long has your mother been unconscious?" he asked.

Tommy glanced at the clock. "'Most half an hour," he replied. His mouth and eyes and nose twitched, but he spoke quite firmly. There was the making of a man in Tommy.

"Oh, she's dead!" wailed Jane. "Oh, Amelia! Oh, my sister, my sister!"

Dr. Emerson rose and looked at Jane Strong with cool hostility. "She is not dead, unless you make her so by your lack of self-control," said he. "You must all be as quiet as you can."

Jane stopped wailing and regarded him with awed eyes, the eyes of a feminine thing cowed by the superior coolness in adversity of a male. She was afraid of that clear pink and white young masculine face with its steady outlook of rather cold blue eyes and its firm mouth. Josiah, Hannah, and the doctor carried Amelia to her room, and laid her, still unconscious, upon her bed. Then after a while she awakened, but she was a broken creature. They hardly recognized her as Amelia. Amelia without her ready hand for them all, her ready step for their comfort, seemed hardly credible. She lay sunken among her pillows in a curious, inert fashion. She was very small and slight, but she gave an impression of great weight, so complete was her abandonment to exhaustion, so entirely her bed sustained her, without any effort upon her part.

Addie cornered the doctor in the front hall on his way out. "What do you think is the matter with mother?" she whispered. The doctor looked at Addie's pretty, pale face. He was unmarried, and had had dreams about Addie Lamkin.

"Your mother is simply worn out, Miss Lamkin," said Dr. Emerson, curtly; yet his eyes, regarding that pretty face, were pitying.

Soft rose suffused Addie's face and neck. She looked piteously at the doctor, with round eyes like a baby's, pleading not to be hurt. The doctor's tone softened a little.

"Of course I realize how almost impossible it is to prevent self-sacrificing women like your mother from offering themselves up," he said.

Tears stood in Addie's eyes. "Mother never complained, and she seemed to want—" she returned, brokenly.

"Yes, she seemed to want to do every-

thing and not let anybody else do anything, and everybody indulged her."

"Of course now we shall see that mother does not overdo," said Addie.

"She can't—now."

Addie turned very white. "You don't mean—"

"I don't know. I shall do everything I can, but she is very weak. I never saw a case of more complete exhaustion."

After Dr. Emerson had driven out of the yard, Addie and Annie talked together, Jane Strong made gruel, and Tommy sat beside his mother. Josiah paced up and down the front walk. He had a feeling as if the solid ground was cut from under his feet. He had not known for so many years what it was to live without the sense of Amelia's sustaining care, that he felt at once unreasoning anger with her, a monstrous self-pity, and an agony of anxious love. The one clear thing in his mind was that Amelia ever since their marriage had put in his sleeve buttons and shirt studs. Always he saw those little, nervous, frail hands struggling with the stiff linen and the studs and buttons. It seemed to him that, of all her wrongs, that was the one which he could definitely grasp. He felt that she was worn out, maybe come to her death, through putting in those buttons and studs. Josiah was a great, lumbering masculine creature, full of helpless tenderness. He paced up and down the walk. He looked at his thick fingers, and he saw always those little, slender, nervous ones struggling with his linen and buttons, and he knew what remorse was. Finally he could bear it no longer, and he entered the house and the kitchen, where Jane was making the gruel.

"Dr. Emerson says she is all worn out," he said, thickly.

Jane looked at him viciously. "Of course she is worn out."

"Jane, do you think putting in my sleeve buttons and studs hurt her?"

Jane stared at him. "Everything has hurt her together, I suppose," she replied, grimly.

Josiah went into the dining-room, where Addie and Annie stood talking together. The baby was asleep in his chair, his curly head hanging sidewise. "Your mother seems to be all worn out," Josiah said to his daughters.

"Yes, she is, I am afraid," Annie said, tearfully. "If I had only been stronger."

"If mother had only known *she* wasn't strong," Addie said, fiercely, and Annie did not resent it. "Here I've been saying mother must be let alone to do things because it worried her not to," said Addie. "Great fool, great hypocrite!" She gave a sob of fury at herself.

"I've been thinking how she has always put in my sleeve buttons and shirt studs," said Josiah.

Neither Annie nor Addie seemed to hear what he said.

"If only I had been stronger," repeated Annie.

Addie turned on her. "You have always been enough sight stronger than mother, Annie Sears," said she. "You fairly enjoy thinking you are delicate. You think it is a feather in your cap; you know you do!"

Annie was so astonished she fairly gasped at her sister. She could not speak. Addie made a dart toward Johnny and caught him up in her arms.

"She's always put in my sleeve buttons and studs," said Josiah, in his miserable monotone. Then he returned to the front walk and began pacing up and down.

"Annie Sears," said Addie, "do you know mother is up there all alone with Tommy? Why don't you go up there?"

"Let me take Johnny, and you go, Addie," Annie said, faintly.

Addie thrust Johnny upon Annie, and turned and went up-stairs. Tommy looked up as she entered the room and gave an inaudible "Hush!" "Mother is asleep," he motioned with his lips. Amelia, indeed, lay as if asleep, with her eyes partly open, and a ghastly line of white eyeball showing. Addie sat beside the bed and looked at her mother. Tommy broke down, and curved his arm in its rough sleeve around his freckled face and wept bitterly. Addie did not weep. Gradually the wonderful expression of those who renunciate stole over her face. She was making up her mind to relinquish all thoughts of marriage, to live at home, single, and devote her life to her mother. She realized that she was very unhappy. She thought of Arthur Henderson. She knew quite well that his character was

not one capable of going through life without snatching at one sweet if he could not obtain another. She felt glad that it was so. She had never been so miserable and so blissful in her whole life as she was sitting beside her mother's bed, for she for the first time saw beyond her own self and realized the unspeakable glory there. She reached out a hand and patted Tommy's heaving shoulder.

"We'll all take care of her, and she'll get well. Don't cry, dear," she whispered, very softly.

But Tommy gave his shoulder an impatient shrug and wept on. He was remembering how he had worn so many holes in his mittens and his mother had mended them, and it seemed to him as if mending those mittens was the one thing which had tired her out. He made up his mind, whether she lived or died, that he would never get holes in his mittens again for anybody to mend.

Down-stairs Annie Sears sat beside little Johnny and told him a story. She never knew what the story was about. Johnny had eaten all the sugar in the bowl, and he nestled his little curly head against Annie's shoulder, while she talked in her unhappy voice. After a while Johnny's eyes closed, and Annie lifted him and carried him up-stairs and laid him on her own bed. He was a heavy child, and she bent painfully beneath his weight, and reflected, the while she did so, how many times she had seen her mother toil up-stairs with him—her little mother, whose shoulders were narrower than her own.

Jane finished the bowl of gruel, while Hannah stood looking on. Jane turned upon the girl with sudden fury.

"For the land's sake, get to work, can't you?" she said. "What are you standing there for? Clear off the table, and wash the dishes, and sweep up the kitchen!"

Hannah did not resent the angry voice. She began to weep without covering her face, bawling aloud like a baby. "O Lord! O Lord!" she wailed. "Here's that poor blessed soul all wore out doing my work, whilst I've been standing watching her!"

Meanwhile Amelia Lamkin was lying in her peaceful bed up-stairs in a very trance of happiness. She was quite conscious. She had not a pain. She

realized an enormous weakness and sheer inability to move, but along with it came the blessed sense of release from hard duties. Almost for the first time in her life Amelia Lamkin's conscience did not sting her because she was not up and doing for others. She knew that it was impossible. She felt like one who has received absolution. The weight of her life had slipped from her shoulders.

She lay still day after day, opening her mouth obediently for the spoonfuls of sustenance which were given her, half dozing, half waking, and wholly happy. She did not know that Addie had turned a cold shoulder to Arthur Henderson and that he was already engaged to Eliza Loomis. She did not know of the harrowing anxiety concerning herself. She knew nothing but her conviction that nothing was required of her except to lie still, that other people required nothing except that, that God required nothing except that. Addie always wore a cheerful face when with her mother. Indeed, the readiness with which Arthur Henderson had given her up had caused her pride to act as a tonic, and her eyes had been opened. She even laughed at herself because she had once thought it possible for her to marry Arthur Henderson. She could not yet laugh at the prospect of the life of self-immolation which she ordered for herself since the day her mother had been taken ill, but she was schooling herself to contemplate it cheerfully, although the doctor with his daily visits to her mother was now making it hard. Addie began to realize that this man, had she allowed herself to think of him, might have been more difficult to relinquish than the other. After a while she saw him as little as possible, and received his directions through Annie. Addie and Annie had their days full. They were glad when Tommy's spring vacation came. Tommy was of much assistance, and he developed a curious aptitude for making Hannah work. Addie ate her eggs cooked any way now, and so did Annie, and Josiah Lamkin never said a word if his steak was not quite as rare as usual, and Johnny ate his rice half cooked, and survived.

Amelia's window-shades were up all

day, for the doctor said she should have all the light and sun possible; and as spring advanced she could see, with those patient eyes which apparently saw nothing, but the blue sky crossed with tree branches deepening in color before they burst into leaf and flower. Amelia saw not only those branches, but beyond them, as though they were transparent, other branches, but those other branches grew on the trees of God, and were full of wonderful blooms; and beyond the trees she saw the far-away slope of mountains, and through them in turn the curves of beauty of the Delectable Hills. When Amelia closed her eyes the picture of those trees beyond trees, those mountains beyond mountains, was still with her, and she saw also heavenly landscapes of green meadows, and pearly floods, and gardens of lilies, and her vision, which had been content for years and years with only the dear simple beauties of her little village, was fed to her soul's delight and surfeit. But she was too weak to speak more than a word at a time, and she scarcely seemed to know one of her dear ones. Poor Amelia Lamkin was so tired out in their service that she had gone almost out of their reach for the rest.

At last came a warm day during the first of May, when people said about the village that Mrs. Amelia Lamkin was very low indeed. The air was very soft and full of sweet languor, and those partly opened eyes of Amelia's saw blossoms through blossoms on the tree branches. In the afternoon Dr. Emerson came, and Addie did not shun him. Her mind was too full of her mother for a thought of any human soul besides. She and the young man stood in Amelia's room, over the prostrate little figure, and the doctor took up the slender hand and felt for the pulse in the blue-veined wrist. Then he went over by the window, and stood there with Addie, and Amelia's eyes, which had been closed, opened slowly, and she saw the blooming boughs of the trees of heaven through *them* also. Addie was weeping softly, but her mother did not know it, at first, in her rapt contemplation. She did not see Dr. Emerson put an arm around the girl's waist, she did not hear what he said to

her, but suddenly she *did* hear what the girl said. She heard it more clearly than anything since she had been taken ill. "I can't think of such things with mother lying there the way she is," Addie said, in a whisper. "I wonder at you."

"She can't hear a word; she does not know," said the young man; and Amelia, listening, was surprised to learn how little a physician really knows himself, when she was hearing and understanding every word, and presently seeing. "I would not speak now," Dr. Emerson continued, "I know it must seem untimely to you, but you have been through so much all these weeks, and it is possible that more still is before you soon, and I feel that if you can consent to lean upon me as one who loves you more than anybody else in the world, I may make it all easier. You know I love you, dear."

"You can't love me. I have been an unworthy daughter," Addie sobbed.

"An unworthy daughter? I have never seen such devotion."

"The devotion came too late," Addie replied, bitterly. "If mother had had a little more devotion years ago, she would be up and about now. There is no use talking, Dr. Emerson; you don't know me as I know myself, or you wouldn't once think of me; but, anyway, it is out of the question."

"Why?"

"Because," said Addie, firmly, "I have resolved never to marry, never to allow any other love or interest come between me and my own family. If mother—" Addie could not finish the sentence. She went on, with a word omitted. "I must make all the restitution to her in my power by devoting my whole life to her dear ones—to Tommy and the baby and father. Annie is delicate, although now she tries to think she isn't, and is doing so much."

"We could live here, dear," said the young man, and his voice sounded young and pleasing and pitiful. Amelia herself loved him as he spoke. But Addie turned upon him with a sort of fierceness.

"Don't talk to me any more," she said. "Haven't you eyes? Don't you see I can't bear it? We *could* live here, but you and—maybe others would come between me and my sacred trust. It



can't be, Edward. If mother had lived" (she spoke of her mother as already dead), "of course with Aunt Jane (I think she will live here now, anyway, and she *can* do a good deal) and with Annie, they could have got along, and I don't say I would not have— Of course it must cost me something to give up the sort of life a girl naturally expects. Don't talk to me any more."

Then Amelia sat up in bed. Her eyes were opened wide; they had seen her last of heavenly visions, until the time when they should close forever. In a flash she saw how selfish it was for her, this patient, loving woman, who had thought of others all her life, to be happy in giving up her life. She realized, too, what she

had never felt when in the midst of them, the torture of the fire of martyrdom in which her life had been spent. Now that the unselfishness of others had quenched those fires, she knew what had been, and saw how fair the world might yet be for her. She reached back her loving, longing, willing hands to her loved ones of earth and her earthly home. Amelia spoke in quite a clear, strong voice. Addie turned with a great start and screamed, "Mother!" and Dr. Emerson was by her side in an instant. Amelia looked at them and smiled the smile of a happy, awakening infant.

"I am better," said she; "I am going to get well now. I have lain here long enough."